

Message from the Chief

December 2017

As 2017 comes to a close, much of California remains dry. This has been the most destructive and deadliest fire season in modern California history. That was made painfully clear to us with the tragic loss of Fire Apparatus Engineer Cory Iverson. On this last day of 2017, many of our fire engines remain staffed around the State in response to the year round fire season conditions. This is the new normal. CAL FIRE has been responding to these changing conditions over the course of the last several years by making significant adjustments to our fire protection and resource management programs. Here are some of the key changes:



- Effective July 1, 2017, we are funded for and will be staffing a total of 52 year round fire engines across the State. In addition to responding to wildland fires, these engines will focus on increasing the amount of prescribed fire acreage, defensible space inspections and other fuels treatment projects with the overall goal of reducing wildfire risk.
- The installation and implementation of the Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) system is now in full swing. As AVL is built out and becomes operational over the next several years, it will significantly modernize our command and control system, providing more efficient movement and tracking of resources and situational awareness to enhance fire fighter safety.
- Within the next several months, we will begin the acquisition process to replace the existing fleet of Super Huey helicopters with the Sikorsky S-70i Black Hawk. The process will take the next 3 to 5 years to complete and when finished, the Department will have a helicopter platform prepared to meet the increasing challenges of combating wildland fires in California.
- Construction of a new Southern Region Operations Center is well under way on property repurposed from the March Air Reserve Base in Moreno Valley. This modern facility, slated for opening later in 2018, replaces the aging and outdated Mulberry Street facility in Riverside and will continue to integrate State and federal wildland fire fighting and emergency response coordination for the southern half of California.
- The L.A. Moran Reforestation Center (Davis Nursery) has received permanent funding to begin growing seedlings. The restoration of this program will play a critical role in assisting small forestland landowners with reforestation efforts following wildfires as well as insect and disease outbreaks.
- The Administration and Legislature have budgeted \$220 million in Greenhouse Gas Reduction Funds (Cap and Trade) for CAL FIRE to invest in fire prevention, fuels treatment, forest health and urban forestry activities across California. We will be working with fire agencies, fire safe councils and many other local, state, federal and non-government partners in the coming months to allocate this money for real and effective projects on the ground.

While we have made significant steps forward in keeping pace with the changing conditions, the 2017 fire season has clearly demonstrated we must continue to evaluate and respond to the challenges of this new normal. Over the next year, this will include looking at the impacts of a truly year round operation on our existing seasonal staffing models, maintenance of the aviation and mobile equipment fleets as well as workload in the accounting and administrative functions.

CAL FIRE is leading the way. I routinely receive comments from around the country and the world in recognition of what we do. This recognition does not come because of hand crews, aircraft, fire engines and bull dozers, but rather because of the dedicated people staffing them and the tireless people behind the scenes supporting them. I know, however, that this comes with sacrifice, both for those on the front line, as well as the families and loved ones at home, who are often apart for weeks at a time and miss sharing holidays, birthdays and other special occasions together.

I want to close out 2017 by thanking each and every one of you for your commitment and sacrifice. You have every reason to be proud of the role you play in public safety and natural resource protection in California. I know we will continue to face challenges in 2018, but I am proud to stand beside you as we lead the way.